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ABSTRACT

This publication describes the program at Bishopswood Special School (Oxfordshire, England) which has gone from serving children (ages 2-16) with severe learning difficulties in a special school setting to full integration of all pupils and staff into three mainstream schools. Bishopswood School is described as currently having its own budget, governing body, headteacher, staff, and a pupil roll of 46, but no school building. This report opens with a background discussion of the decision to integrate, reviews the experience of the three partner schools, and outlines the establishment of the new Outreach Service. Additional sections provide information on buildings, curriculum, staffing, finance, and administration. The advantages and concerns of the Bishopswood approach are discussed in the final section, and an historical summary is provided as an appendix. Photographs illustrate the desegregation process. (DB)

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BISHOPSWOOD Good Practice Transferred

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BISHOPSWOOD

Good Practice Transferred

The integration of children with severe learning difficulties from Bishopswood Special School to Valley Road Nursery, Sonning Common Primary and Chiltern Edge Comprehensive Schools, Oxfordshire.

INTRODUCTION

Ten years after the first group of Bishopswood pupils moved out of their purpose built special school building all staff and pupils are now in ordinary schools and an Outreach Service has been established to help other children in mainstream.

This successful integration programme was initiated by the special school head and staff together with the three mainstream schools who were keen to take part.

There were teething problems but the firm conclusion is that these 46 children, many with severe learning difficulties, are now receiving an appropriate and improved educational and social experience in the new setting.

The Bishopswood approach to integration involves retaining the school's separate identity, mainly for administrative and financial purposes, while educating the children in three mainstream partner schools. The paramount consideration in the approach has been to ensure that the children's special needs are properly met.

The following report is a detailed description and evaluation of the on-going de-segregation process written by Bishopswood Staff and edited by CSIE. It opens with the background to the decision to integrate, covers the experience of the three partner schools and the new Outreach Service, and includes sections on buildings, curriculum, staffing, finance and administration. The advantages and concerns of the Bishopswood approach are discussed in the final section. A historical summary is also provided as an appendix on page 14.

This factsheet updates and replaces CSIE's earlier publication *Transferring Good Practice* (1985).

Why Integration?

The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Disabled People (1975) says that "Whatever the origin, nature and seriousness of their handicaps and disabilities, disabled people have the same fundamental rights as their fellow citizens of the same age which implies first and foremost the right to a decent life as normal and as full as possible"

The staff at Bishopswood School believe that right should include the right of special needs pupils, including those with severe learning problems, to receive their education alongside children without such needs.

Special schools and segregated units were created to house a population of children whose disability it was felt prevented them from receiving an education in ordinary schools. Those special schools, generally speaking, have provided a useful and very good education.

However, because of the existence of segregated provision, some schools, instead of looking at their curricula and ways of reorganising to enable them to provide for special needs pupils, have taken the easy alternative and moved their more disabled children to separate provision.

Special schools have, quite rightly, been allowed to operate a system of positive discrimination in terms of staff to pupil ratio and capitation allowance. In some cases they have been centres of expertise.

This element of positive discrimination and the pool of expertise is essential if special needs are to be met. What we hope we are doing at Bishopswood is proving that it is possible to transfer an example of good practice to ordinary schools, and by doing so, provide an even better education for our pupils.

Tony Booth states in Integrating Special Education (1983) that the only valid educational arguments for special schools are those which include the isolation of a group of children "as an essential feature of the education they are to receive. The isolation of the children might be advocated for their own protection, for the protection of others, as a punishment or because a definite educational benefit is likely to be derived by such a separated grouping". At Bishopswood we certainly do not want to protect our children from society by hiding them away. On the contrary, we want the children to be accepted as valued and important members of society, and this will not come about by their segregation. We do not need to protect anyone from our children.

Tony Booth adds that advocates of separate schooling for children with severe learning problems "argue that such schools offer protection from a prejudiced world and that they are the foundation and insurance for advances in the education of the severely mentally handicapped children". As he goes on to demonstrate, we maintain that prejudices that exist in society against children and adults with severe learning difficulties are the direct result of segregationist policies, and that with acceptance, protection becomes less necessary.

Our integration attempts at Bishopswood and similar schemes elsewhere may well prove a desirable advance in the education of children with severe learning difficulties.

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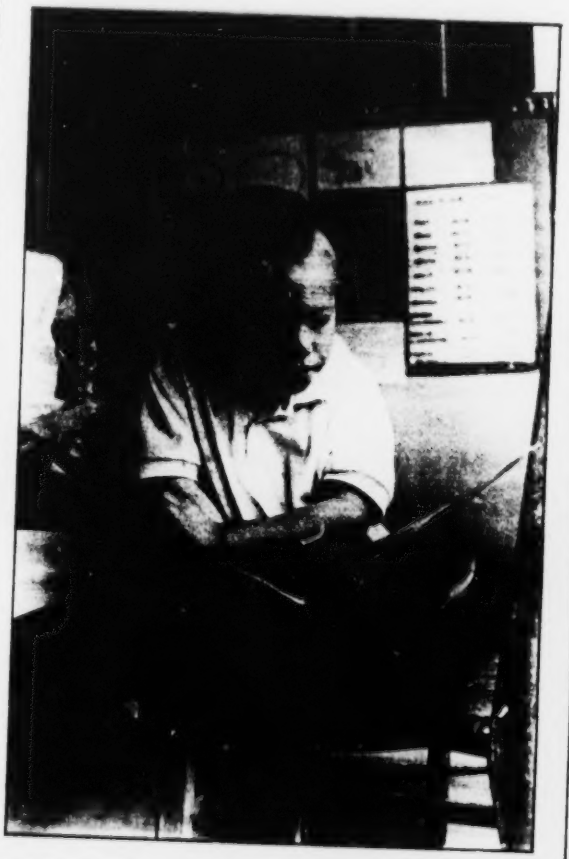
Introducing Bishopswood

Bishopswood school, for pupils aged 2 - 16 with developmental delay or severe learning difficulties, has its own budget, governing body, headteacher, staff, a pupil roll of 46, but no school building. Classes for all our pupils, whatever the nature or degree of their learning difficulties, are within mainstream partner schools.

We are based in relatively prosperous South Oxfordshire with a catchment area considerably larger (15 miles) than the three schools where our classes are based. Bishopswood pupils are seen as a vital part of their mainstream school communities. They themselves feel that they belong and they usually wear the appropriate school uniform.

Each Bishopswood class has its own room with a teacher and assistant. This provides a secure base from which pupils move for shared educational and social experiences in the mainstream, as appropriate for each individual. Bishopswood staff working in the three schools meet at least once a week. Pupils and staff come together twice a term for assemblies and social events which are times of celebration.

Our pupils have a range of difficulties similar to those found in any small special school. We have a number of pupils with profound and multiple difficulties and several who are withdrawn and have difficulty establishing relationships.



From its first days Bishopswood had links with the primary and comprehensive schools where it is now based. The head of Bishopswood participated in local school networks and secondary school pupils visited us to help at mealtimes.

Before moving to the mainstream, consultations were held with the ordinary school staff and with parents at Bishopswood and in the partner schools. Pupils themselves made advance visits to prepare them for the new settings.

Although early staff consultation is important, familiarity with individual children and clear guidelines on professional responsibility proved to be the main factors in building confidence. The majority of parents were supportive and keen to proceed. Some initial reservations about physical safety were expressed but soon disappeared once the children settled into their new environments.

Bishopswood has three mainstream partner schools and also offers an Outreach Service to pupils with statements of special educational needs attending other mainstream schools.

1 Valley Road Nursery, Henley, has sixteen places for Bishopswood pupils, aged 2-5, with a wide range of special needs (including language and moderate

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learning difficulties). All children on the Bishopswood roll require an educational assessment. Pupils with severe general developmental delay have admission priority.

When Bishopswood nursery provision first transferred to mainstream the children were initially based at Sonning Common Primary School. Numbers had been dropping before the move but, once in the mainstream, children with a wider range of difficulties started to attend, the nursery thrived, and the importance of its assessment role expanded.

The advantage of making expert help more widely available at an early stage was soon established and became an important factor in the LEA's decision to make new nursery provision an integrated facility with Bishopswood maintaining responsibility for special needs pupils.

On joining the integrated nursery at Henley some parents may express concern that their child is not "as good" as the others. On these occasions, our continuing commitment as a special school to meeting the needs of all is of paramount importance.

2 Sonning Common Primary School, Sonning Common, has had children with severe learning difficulties for ten years. Currently there are three home bases for 18 pupils with severe learning difficulties, aged 5-11 years; by the time they start at Sonning Common Primary School, all Bishopswood children have had an assessment and are statemented under the 1981 Education Act.

Our aim is to provide a good education within as normal environment as possible and we are still learning how best this can be achieved. We want Bishopswood children to be accepted as part of the school community so we have always regarded the dining room and playground as starting points for integration.

Many mainstream pupils make persistent efforts over several months to make contact with our more reserved members and in general, children are actively considerate and kind. The most disabled children are much sought after. During ten years in mainstream there have been only very occasional cases of unkindness or teasing. Sometimes a vulnerable child may be led into a potentially embarrassing situation, but it is rare indeed to find that "laughing with" has turned into "laughing at", and when it does happen it is handled firmly by staff.

At one stage we prepared mainstream peers with a disability awareness course but have concluded that for infants especially, this approach is not particularly effective. Children are best left to form their own relationships and to make their own sense of any difference they perceive, provided staff are always available to answer spontaneous questions.

If there is any difficulty with mainstream peers it is that they want to help too much. There are always more than enough volunteers and "let him do it for himself" is a frequent comment from staff.

Most of our children spend some time in mainstream classes. They go individually, accompanied by a classroom assistant for a half to one-and-a-half days a week. We try to enable pupils to move up with their mainstream peer group and feel strongly that they should move onto secondary provision when they are 11-years-old.

Since September 1990 small groups of mainstream children have also started to come to our classrooms, not as helpers, but to work alongside our children. Integration is probably most successful at our weekly movement/drama session which is shared with members of a junior class.

Our support assistants make a record of every session in a mainstream class so that each child's programme can be evaluated with the class teacher, mainstream teacher and parents. When a child on the Bishopswood roll has learned that speech addressed to everyone also

includes him, mainstream teachers tend to feel more confident about taking greater responsibility

By the time children join our junior class we try to involve them in evaluating their own experience: one pupil commented that she liked to go to Mrs. H's class but she did not like to stay there too long.

Some parents of younger Bishopswood children still worry occasionally that bad habits will be picked up from more disabled children. In general more normal, rather than odd behaviour, is experienced; copying is short-term and disappears with a growing sense of identity and self-worth.

The integrated education experience at Sonning Common is most effective when children live locally.

3. Chiltern Edge Comprehensive School, Sonning Common, has two classes for pupils with severe learning difficulties, aged 11-16 years. Contacts with various departments in Chiltern Edge have developed steadily since the first group transferred in 1983. Facilities for multiply disabled youngsters were finished in March 1990. Most of our youngsters are now known individually by most mainstream staff.

The kind of integration model which was adopted by Bishopswood - a group of ten to 15 pupils and at least two teachers - is the most effective to make an impact on a large institution like Chiltern Edge which has about 900 pupils.

As in the primary school, the lunch break is a useful learning experience for our pupils; most choose to join their mainstream peers, though for some this is a big step which may only be achieved after several months or longer. Chiltern Edge pupils also use our rooms at lunchtime and for some, the base serves as a temporary sanctuary away from the rest of the school.

- Most Bishopswood pupils spend about a third of schooltime in mainstream classes. Shared lessons include drama, English, maths, geography, keyboard skills, home economics, textiles and swimming.

The classroom assistant who supports individuals in mainstream classes is skilled at bringing out the main lesson points, explaining what to do, and deciding when to encourage discussion.

Joint residential experiences have been particularly useful in building links with Chiltern Edge staff and pupils.

When we first moved to Chiltern Edge, which is a mile from the primary school, we thought the easiest links would be with the special needs department. In fact, the department staff are fully stretched offering support to mainstream classes;. nevertheless good links are being developed.

Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI) funds have enabled the senior Bishopswood departments to link with other secondary schools in the area which have co-operative teaching arrangements for some minority subjects. Participation in country stewardship and theatre arts courses have been particularly beneficial. Bishopswood had its first successful GCSE drama entrant as a result of this participation. TVEI has also enabled two youngsters with severe disabilities to attend their local secondary schools for a painting class. Parents report that contact begun in school is developing out of school hours and this is a big morale booster for families who have been socially isolated.

A short "caring experience" course run by a Bishopswood teacher for mainstream pupils is proving extremely popular. Response to a disability awareness course for mainstream pupils is also encouraging - as encouraging as the increased maturity, curiosity and confidence observed in Bishopswood pupils.

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4 *The Bishopwood Outreach Service* for pupils with statements of special educational needs attending local mainstream schools is staffed by two Bishopswood teachers and an assistant on a full time basis. The team is supervised by an educational psychologist and includes two days a week speech therapy support.

Fourteen children in ten local primary schools are covered by the service. Although team members help children individually, the main aim of the service is to support school staff who retain responsibility for all children. Encouraging planning and evaluation each term have been priorities in order to ensure a consistent and appropriate approach.

The work of the Outreach team helps local schools to turn a moral commitment to include all children into an educationally sound placement in which progress can be reviewed with confidence by the school staff themselves. With a wider variety of more closely linked provision it may also be easier for parents to accept a change of placement to one of the Bishopswood partner schools if it becomes necessary at a later stage.

The need for parents of mainstream children with special educational needs to meet together for support has emerged as a result of the Outreach team's work. Some parents now meet in each other's homes; professionals may be invited to attend the meetings from time to time but our main contribution is to pass on relevant information about services and arrangements for meetings.

"Walking tall"

In 1981 when we moved our first group of children and teachers into the mainstream the aim of Bishopswood staff was to expose them to good models of social interaction, normal play and language development. Although no long-term comparable study has been undertaken and progress can not be attributed solely to integration, ten years later experience has confirmed the advantages. Pupils "walk tall", showing greater self-esteem and confidence; they have an improved attitude to learning, and are more willing "to have a go". Language has also improved, though not so much in structure as in the sheer amount of language used, and in greater willingness to initiate conversation for a wider range of purposes.

Rubbing along with more able children, year after year, undoubtedly increases motivation to learn in some areas, encourages social awareness and enriches the individual child. However, we are more cautious about teaching reading, writing and number skills in a fully integrated setting. Our experience has shown that provided there is a well-resourced, supported and committed school, full-time integration is most successful when children have good language, (four word level), an outward personality, and when copying other children is their most useful learning strategy. Children on the Bishopswood roll often do not have these advantages and also need specialist resources, small groups and a high staff ratio to meet their learning needs.

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The Buildings

Primary School

Before the major alterations of mainstream sites began, adaptations were made piece-meal as the need arose. The campus at Sonning Common Primary School is large, with a pre-war building and a pleasant modern block. Our first room was in the older building, in a traditional classroom near the junior playground. There were toilets outside the classroom so no adaptations were initially required. The second group was based in the modern block on the other side of the campus. This had previously been used by mainstream infants and there were already toilets there.

Between 1984 and 1987 our special needs assessment nursery was based at the primary school. We would have preferred this class to be away from our post-5 provision but costs dictated its placement next to our classroom in the modern block. Funds were provided for a fence, which created an enclosed garden area for play, a wheelchair ramp, hand rails, a sluice, a washing machine and dryer, and a direct telephone line. We were pleased with the facilities and were somewhat surprised by complaints from some parents who felt that the fence "isolated" our pupils and the close proximity of pre-school amounted to "going backwards". In fact, a fence is required by regulation for any nursery provision.

Sonning Common had no medical room and facilities had to be built when a child requiring regular catheterisation joined the school. This added to the facilities of both schools. Gradually a number of ramps were built, making access easier.

Comprehensive School

When the senior group moved into Chiltern Edge in September 1983 we occupied first one classroom, and then two, in a busy part of the main building overlooking the quadrangle where a large proportion of the partner school pupils spent their breaktimes. This provided the young people of Bishopswood with the opportunity of observing their mainstream peers without having to cope with large groups of individuals until they felt ready. This illustrates the goodwill shown to our pupils from the beginning, since a number of less than satisfactory mobile classrooms were in use by the partner school and remain today.

When the day actually came to move in, our classroom was not painted, decorated or equipped. Consequently the first half of the term was very fragmented. On some days everyone had to return to the special school building because the classroom could not be used. There was no easy access to water and the lack of a quiet room or place of safety proved to be a problem for the one disturbed autistic teenager in the group. There was already considerable pressure on Chiltern Edge facilities such as the home economics area and the gym but goodwill enabled us to have access, as a discreet group, to these facilities.

The social advantages of the move became increasingly apparent as the months passed and from time to time we reminded ourselves that our provision for senior pupils had not been all we had wanted in the special school building either. At this early stage of the integration process lack of small quiet rooms on both sites caused concern and an area in the primary school eventually became a base for therapy staff and Outreach work.

Nursery School

By the time the decision was made to open an integrated nursery in Henley, we felt we knew exactly what needed to be provided. Special needs staff were available for consultation from the beginning; some compromises due to financial constraints needed to be made but, within the constraints, officers and school staff worked well together planning the building work, including two small rooms for one-to-one work.

Completing the task

Bishopswood pupils had been based at the primary school for about four years when mainstream staff enquired about the children who were left behind, asking what was so different about them? During visits to Bishopswood they found no children who posed a threat but several who needed a lot of help in a livelier environment. We began looking towards moving everyone onto mainstream sites.

Partner schools were enthusiastic about integrating all pupils. There were mixed feelings amongst the parents of children requiring the most care; a move into less segregated provision would decrease isolation certainly but would standards of care be maintained? Parents were reassured that the same staff would be responsible for their children in the new surroundings. Staff knew they would have to make changes in order to ensure continuity, but looked on this as a positive opportunity to improve what was on offer. We were determined that facilities in partner schools would be at least as good as those left behind.

Following extensive consultations, sketches were made for adaptations on both sites to include improved facilities for all groups, including those already taught in partner schools. However, cost prohibited the inclusion of a wheelchair lift for upstairs access.

Bishopswood staff and governors were major contributors to the design and layout of the areas to be converted. Our priorities were a hydrotherapy pool to replace the one in the special school which had been paid for by the school association, large classroom areas, an inclusion of a number of small rooms, and enough room for storage. We wanted the kind of comfortably large working areas that were being enjoyed at the special school with room for all the necessary wheelchairs, standing frames, plinths, etc. Getting it right took a long time, in particular finding the appropriate balance between how far the environment was altered to suit children with disabilities and learning difficulties and how far children adapted to suit the environment. Many sketches later, layouts and designs were agreed by all concerned in which Bishopswood priorities were well provided for.

The facilities available to us now at all the mainstream sites are as good as those left behind in the purpose-built special school and, in the case of Chiltern Edge school, much better. At no time during the move were children forced to miss lessons.

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The Curriculum

From a social perspective, integrated provision is about valuing each individual and the importance of self worth. When thinking about integration and the curriculum we are primarily concerned with motivation, breadth, and balance. The following two examples illustrate these points.

1 The first is the story, frequently told by the headteacher of the primary school, of Glyn who has cerebral palsy and had learnt to walk shortly before the move to mainstream. Each day he used to stagger across the large campus to give the class register to the school secretary, just like pupils in other classes. Well motivated, his walking skills rapidly improved. He is a quiet, passive boy. In his base classroom he learned to make a choice from drinks offered at breaktimes. In his mainstream class he enjoyed listening to poems and learnt to ask, in front of the whole class, for a particular favourite.

2 Tropical rainforests provide us with a second example. Rainforests were the subject of several geography lessons at Chiltern Edge attended by two of our pupils who were supported by an assistant. This topic was followed up in the base classroom to build on basic skills work. It can rightly be said that "good practice for special needs is good practice for all".

Staff at Bishopswood certainly need some of the knowledge and skills found in mainstream colleagues. Good practice at Sonning Common has particularly influenced our approach to early literacy, writing and maths. The benefits of drama for our pupils were highlighted following successful shared educational experiences in drama and the theatre arts at secondary level.

On the other hand Bishopswood staff also have an essential understanding of early child development, (ie that which takes place naturally in the majority of children before they start school) and a consciousness that independence is usually the most important long-term goal for our pupils. Our special contribution to the education of our pupils is about making learning accessible and relevant and having high expectations. Some approaches from special education that we have found to be especially useful are the emphasis on developing functional movement, movement as motivation and movement to develop body awareness and encourage relationships. For this we are much indebted to the work of Esther Cotton and the late Dr Geoffrey Waldon and Veronica Sherbourne.

We decided early on not to compromise the developmental curriculum. In many ways it meets our pupils' needs well. "Learning how to learn" operations such as sorting, ordering or copying are, for example, general learning tools that are used in all curriculum areas and everyday activities. We feel that our daily contact with mainstream education helped us to assimilate the National Curriculum and we see that the Developmental Curriculum can both lead forwards and be enhanced by the National Curriculum programmes of study.

The development of TVEI for 14 to 19 year-olds in Oxfordshire has also had a beneficial impact on curriculum development encouraging work on Records of Achievement, Information Technology and Science.

At the time of writing (1991) we are undertaking Standard Attainment Tasks (SATs) with three seven-year-olds to evaluate their relevance, if any, for our pupils: these assessments will certainly not be sufficient for those on the Bishopswood School roll. It may be that, by participating in this exercise, Outreach staff and the class teachers with whom they work, will be encouraged to look further into the curriculum offered to those children in mainstream who are working towards or within Level 1 of the National Curriculum, and are likely to be at this stage for much longer than usual.

Curriculum delivery is based on a thorough assessment in all areas of learning, the drafting of an individual work programme agreed with parents at the annual review. Topic work, shared educational experiences and extra-curricular activities are used to enrich the learning process.

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Staffing

Bishopswood School is staffed within the guidelines set out in the Circular 11/90 Staffing in Special Schools and could not operate successfully otherwise. We have two additional classroom assistants and extra lunchtime supervisors. The headteacher is based at Sonning Common Primary and the deputy headteacher at Chiltern Edge. Each Bishopswood department has a team leader and this is proving to be a key role because of the greater need for good communication within the school and liaison with mainstream schools.

The nursery class and Outreach Service are led by teachers with a 'C' allowance. Teachers join Bishopswood with a 'B' allowance and this does not seem to be a concern of mainstream colleagues who have Bishopswood pupils in their classes, though we ourselves would like to have more flexibility with regard to allowances. Our classroom assistants receive on-the-job training.

Partner schools do not have extra staff on our account. Before the introduction of local management of schools (LMS) the primary school was allowed to keep a teacher despite a falling roll to assist integration. This post was used to make the mainstream infant classes smaller. As this was a post from the special schools budget, it was not possible, under the LMS formula, to transfer it permanently to the primary school. Instead it was transferred to Bishopswood to expand the Outreach Service. As a result local schools educating children with statements of special educational needs, including Sonning Common Primary school, have benefited.

Links between the staff

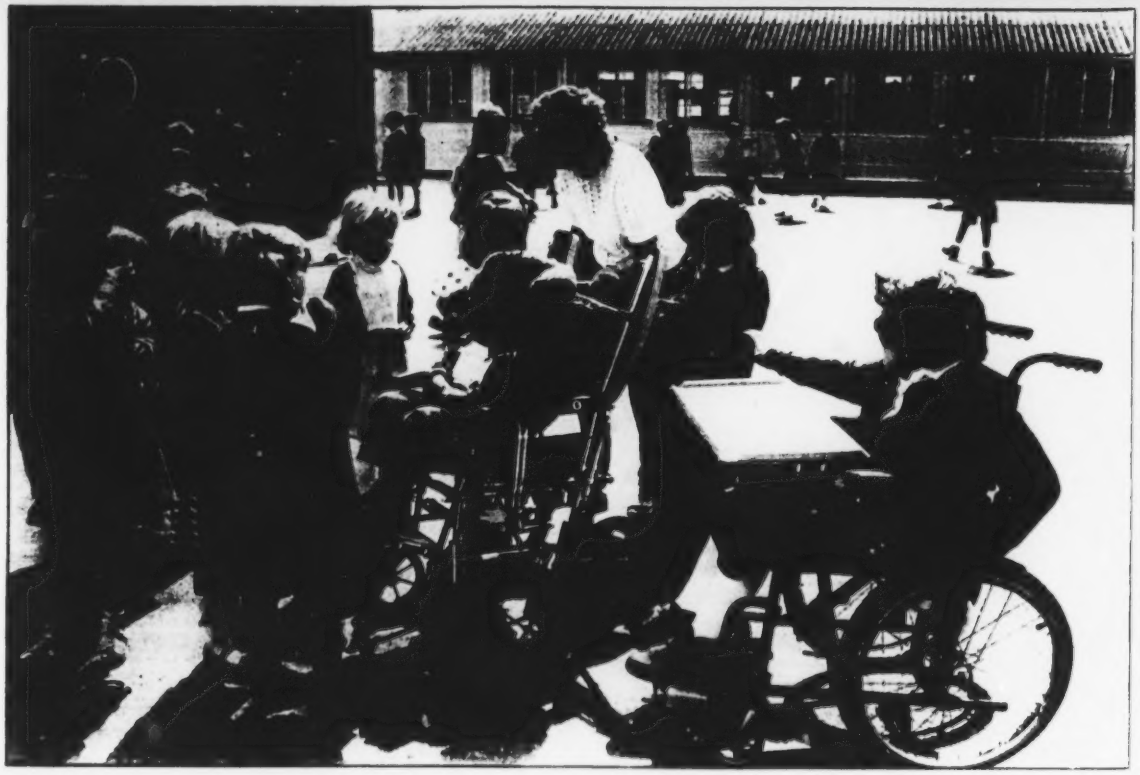
All the present headteachers in this integration partnership were appointed after it began. Their commitment and that of their predecessors is a key factor in the scheme's success. While it can be counter-productive to push individual members of staff who feel uneasy about integration, a strong lead and a healthy school ethos builds confidence. Liaison is easiest between the headteachers as this is seen as part of their role.

Participation in TVEI has enabled staff working with our senior pupils to build up strong links with Chiltern Edge staff as well as staff in other secondary schools in the area. Links between other staff members are constrained by the lack of non-contact time and the current pressure of work associated with the National Curriculum and other new and pressing initiatives.

The nursery staff, special needs and mainstream teachers, work together as a close team. Bishopswood team leaders attend some mainstream staff meetings but pressures on directed time mean that regular attendance is not possible.

Liaison at Chiltern Edge is assisted because the deputy head of Bishopswood, who is based at the comprehensive school, is able to work closely with both the head of the special needs department and one of the Deputy Heads who has a responsibility as special needs coordinator. Over the years several staff have worked at both Bishopswood and Sonning Common Primary Schools and this common knowledge enables them to work more closely.

Primary school staff involved with a Bishopswood child, are invited to the child's annual review. The headteacher of the primary school will take their class in order that they may attend. However, the issue of time for planning and liaison has not been resolved and must, to a certain extent, limit what can be achieved - it is certainly a source of frustration.



Our work with children who have an additional physical handicap has been assisted by the use of additional part-time helpers for one-to-one and group work, available with support from the Motor Impaired Education Project based at the Ormerod School for children with physical disabilities in Oxford.

Paramedical support staff

The managers of the paramedical services felt they had been consulted very late when Bishopswood School opened in 1977. We therefore endeavoured to consult in the early stages as the integration scheme proceeded. Fully stretched and under resourced service managers had some reservations about this new pattern of provision, particularly as travelling time invariably encroached on time available for service delivery. However, they remained supportive and the personnel actually involved at school level are convinced of the advantages of integration and work well within the new pattern of provision.

Physiotherapy hours for the school are satisfactory although those in this service would like to be able to work more effectively with children placed full-time in mainstream schools.

There is less emphasis on 'hands on' work with individual children and a greater emphasis on encouraging everyday function, as well as supporting both staff and parents in their common aim to achieve each child's optimal movement independence. We have taken what we can use from Conductive Education, given the totally different approach to education in this country and the extent of the children's learning difficulties. Small numbers and a wide age range now make using a group approach problematical but we would have faced the same difficulties if we were working in the special school building.

For many years the old Bishopswood School had a speech therapist for one and a half days a week. Once the school was on split sites this was increased temporarily to two days a week. When this returned to one and a half days it was definitely more difficult for the speech therapist to provide a service across the age range and it was agreed that she would concentrate on the younger children.

In 1990 the Oxfordshire Education Authority decided to increase paramedical services for pupils with special educational needs using savings from reductions in out county placements. Extra speech therapy hours were allocated and some were used to work in mainstream schools with children identified as having special educational needs. Children who do not fit into this category still attend their local community clinic. Speech therapists now place greater emphasis on group work and sharing their expertise with staff and parents.

The Health Authority was also able to employ a part time school nurse for Bishopswood whose work involves, amongst other things, liaising with the school medical service, making home visits and training staff in the correct administration of emergency medication.

These specialist staff work both at Bishopswood and local mainstream schools so we have been able to build up a common ethos with a good team approach. The specialist staff contribute towards inservice training and curriculum development and have kept abreast of an unfolding National Curriculum. Some parents and staff have difficulty accepting that less direct approaches to therapy are effective.

Satisfactory communication is a problem for many part-time and peripatetic support staff. Because provision is dispersed good communication becomes even more important and is an area which needs to be constantly worked at. We value the contribution these support services make to good practice. Their work illustrates what can be achieved with relatively good resources and team work.

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Administration & Finance

Oxfordshire LEA is administered in divisional areas with the same education officers having special and mainstream responsibilities. This means that officers know the partner schools well. All the headteachers deal with the same people in the office and communication is simplified. In as far as they can, officers in the South Division respond sympathetically to special needs issues in the light of local circumstances.

The Bishopswood governing body - including the parent governors - has always been supportive of de-segration. When the nursery opened it was decided that both schools would have a governor in common and this has been helpful. Copies of reports and minutes of meetings of the Bishopswood governing body are sent to named governors of partner schools and these members are invited to attend our meetings as observers.

All the schools have separate budgets; Sonning Common Primary and Chiltern Edge are in LMS and it is under serious consideration for Oxfordshire special schools, including Bishopswood, to follow suit.

As a goodwill gesture, a nominal sum from Bishopwood's enhanced capitation is transferred to both the comprehensive and primary schools. A more substantial percentage of the capitation allowance is transferred for our nursery children, since orders for general stock are made jointly.

Enhanced though our capitation may be, we still spend four times more than our allowance on equipment and materials and this is an issue that needs to be addressed in preparation for LMS(Special).

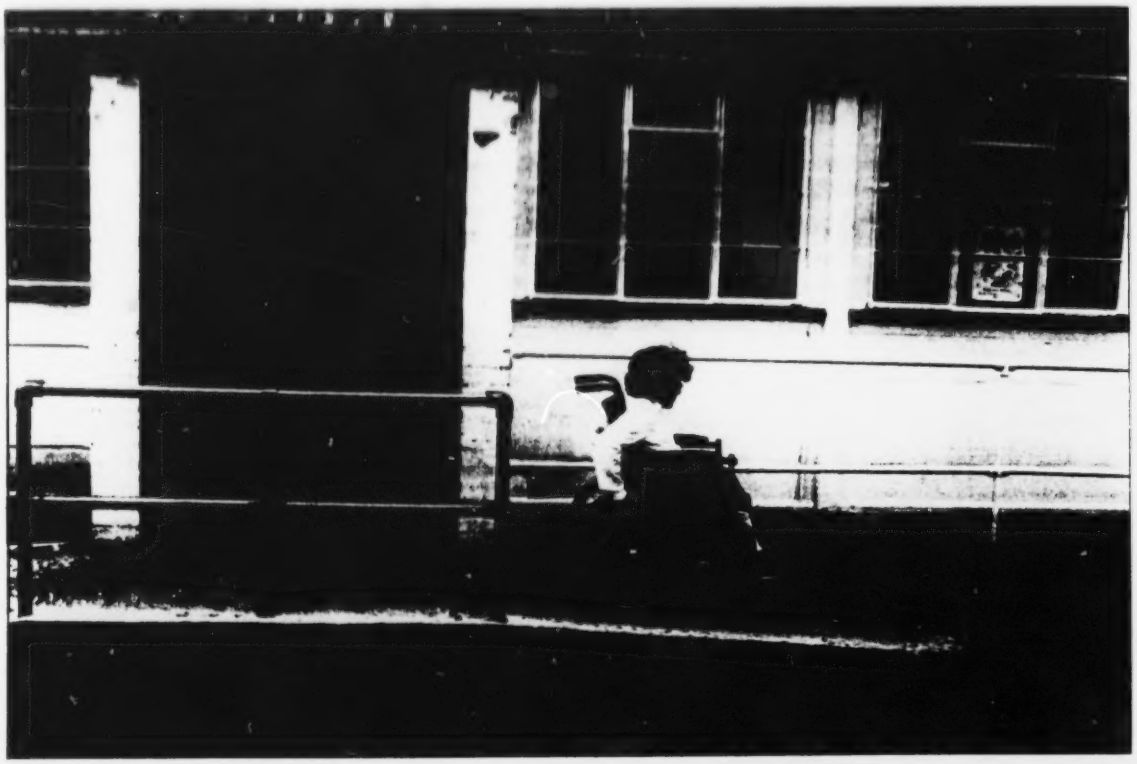
Retaining a separate Bishopswood identity means all our funds can be directed for the benefit of our pupils. This is an important consideration when regularly changing governing bodies take on greater responsibility for spending priorities. Although it should be possible to make sure that all special needs funds are actually channelled into special needs, we are concerned that some LEAs will not be in a position to undertake the close monitoring required.

About half our capitation is spent on running costs like telephones, and photocopiers; we therefore receive an additional payment to assist with the administrative costs involved in split site and Outreach provision.

Our capitation is boosted by donations and funds raised by the school association (BSA); this extra financial support is essential and could not be guaranteed if our children were on the roll of mainstream schools.

It is usually only when fund-raising that the phrase "special school for handicapped children" may be used. This is an unfortunate necessity which continues to cause embarrassment, though parents say staff can be too sensitive in their wish to avoid labels. When we became fully based in partner schools, Bishopswood held a wine and cheese evening to explain to parents and teachers in partner schools why some separate fund raising would remain essential.

Our final move to mainstream coincided with the introduction of LMS and this made the need to be seen to be paying our way more urgent. The principle of reimbursement for Bishopswood costs was agreed on



quickly. All expenses would be taken into consideration, for example the extra energy used to maintain the higher temperatures needed so that immobile children are comfortable. In practice it is proving to be both a difficult sum to calculate and transfer, given the blunt instrument of LMS.

All the headteachers and governing bodies concerned in this partnership are determined to maintain goodwill. Insisting on an exact payment for each and every service would be a nightmare. Of course, we make our own arrangements to help each other out, for example the football team might use our washing machine to wash their dirty gear, our video camera is regularly out on loan and our school minibuses can be booked. We all intend to see this co-operation continue in the future, despite the increasing pressures of the "market place".

Financial pressures or a change of personnel in the future might leave our classes in a vulnerable position now we have no separate school building. To help prepare for such difficulties a memorandum of agreement has been drawn up and has been agreed by all concerned. This details present arrangements in areas such as accommodation, services and health and safety. Headteachers review these arrangements annually and they can only be altered by mutual agreement. If there is a disagreement, the LEA will mediate. Beyond this arrangement we have little defence against the possible spectre of opting for grant maintained status by any of the partner schools, although it is a very remote possibility at present.

Conclusions

The Bishopswood scheme is one of many successful examples of integration, both in Oxfordshire and elsewhere. Across the country the education system is still structured to make integration the exception rather than the norm. For as long as this is the case, each integration scheme will be unique with its own blend of advantages, on-going issues and concerns. The approach adopted at Bishopswood is no different in this respect with its particular mix of positive and negative aspects, though we feel that much of the best of both mainstream and special school education is now available for the benefit of our pupils.

Set out below are the major advantages, on-going issues and concerns associated with the approach used at Bishopswood, as seen by staff at the time of writing this report (1991).

Advantages

1 The move of the first group of pupils to mainstream in 1981 enabled a group of very difficult and disturbed youngsters to leave a hospital environment and move into the special school building.

2 Pupils' self-esteem, motivation and confidence have grown. Use of language and behaviour have also improved.

3 Pupils can come to terms with their limitations supported by friends of similar ability.

4 Families have an accepted place in the local community and parents are given time to come to terms with the loss of the expected "ideal" child.

5 Resources from the LEA and money from fund-raising is clearly targeted.

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6 Staff can be moved if necessary. Pupils do not have the same teacher for too long but neither do they have to change teacher and classmates each year. Staff also have an opportunity to widen their teaching experience at a time when the career structure for special needs teachers is limited.

7 In service special needs training for staff can be provided. This is becoming an increasingly important consideration as the supply of trained special needs teachers appears to be drying up.

8 Good practice can be transferred in both directions so that all children are seen as active learners.

9 A real continuum of provision may be available.

10 In the long term a new generation of people will grow up unafraid of learning difficulty and prepared to accept responsibility for providing equal opportunities for those who are less able.

Concerns

Some of these concerns and ongoing issues have much in common with other small special schools while others are connected with our particular approach to integration, as well as with integration in general.

Concerns with special schools

1 Organising effective group work in small classes of less than eight children.

2 Including children with multiple disabilities in these small classes.

3 Balancing the need for staff training with the need to minimise disruption to children's work.

Concerns with the Bishopswood approach

1 Retaining the identity of Bishopswood as an institution, while aiming for pupils and staff to feel part of partner schools.

We feel that unresolved issues connected with funding (including fund-raising), responsibility for special needs, ensuring a high quality of special needs teaching, and organising teacher training make it too risky for our children to move onto the roll of the three mainstream partner schools at present. The lack of a firm commitment to integration by the education system and society in general also makes us have doubts about a formal transfer to mainstream for the time being.

2 Promoting good communication within and between Bishopswood departments.

The team leader's role is crucial to overcome the difficulties of split-site provision.

3 Building links with other local schools in a manageable way. Ideally provision could probably be dispersed, even further, but with so many educational changes under way this seems to be too big a risk at present.

Concerns about integration

1 Effective integration depends heavily on the commitment of the mainstream class teacher, yet the development of whole-school policies accepting responsibility for the full range of special needs is slow and teachers' attitudes to integration vary.

2 The common practice of holding back children with severe learning difficulties behind their peer group means that their crucial secondary school education is reduced.

3 There is a danger that the close relationship with mainstream special needs assistants or helpers may prevent children learning to be independent.

4 In mainstream children with disabilities or learning difficulties miss the solidarity and security of being with a stable network of people with similar experiences.

5 Mainstream funding needs to be organised to meet all needs in a way which avoids the temptation for schools to exaggerate disabilities or learning difficulties in order to gain extra resources.

Last word

Everyone concerned with Bishopswood School is growing and learning as the children themselves grow and learn. We are convinced of the benefits of educating all children in as normal a situation as possible and know that it is possible for a mainstream setting to provide a stimulating and accepting climate within which children can be well educated. However, some positive discrimination will always be necessary to achieve a relatively stress-free and well supported learning environment.

Integration is not about learning 'to pass as normal' this is patronising and may lead to much internal conflict. Integration is concerned with *valuing everyone* and providing equal learning opportunities.

Bishopswood has endeavoured to develop along these lines with much assistance from mainstream colleagues and a sympathetic LEA that has responded readily when prompted. We have all been trying to move in the same direction. Politically motivated initiatives under the Education Reform Act may now be prodding schools down another path. We will continue to attempt to find ways of by-passing or using new initiatives to the further advantage of our special pupils whenever possible.

Historical Summary

Bishopswood School opened in 1977 in a new building on an isolated but pleasant site to complement and eventually replace Borocourt Hospital School. Before the opening of Bishopswood, pupils with severe learning difficulties in this part of South Oxfordshire attended either the hospital school, where some of the staff also started their careers, or schools in Reading, Berkshire. (South Oxfordshire has never had a special school for children with moderate learning difficulties; they used to attend units in mainstream schools and are now supported in ordinary classes).

In January 1981 a selected group of infants with severe learning difficulties moved to a base at Sonning Common Primary School.

In 1982 the hospital school merged with Bishopswood. Following the merger several parents of older pupils challenged policy that Bishopswood pupils should leave school at 16 years of age. The Secretary of State eventually confirmed that all pupils were entitled to

education up to the age of nineteen years if their parents so wished. Henley Technical College (now Henley Tertiary College) established a special course. This is now a successful part of the integrated educational provision - all Bishopswood pupils move to the College at 16 years of age.

In **September 1982** a second class transferred to Sonning Common Primary School and in **1983** some secondary aged pupils were provided with a classroom in Chiltern Edge Comprehensive School. In **1984** the nursery class moved on to the primary school site as there was no other nursery provision in the area at this stage.

Late in **1985**, Bishopswood governors and staff began discussions with the education authority about the possibility of moving pupils remaining in the Bishopswood building to mainstream sites. In **1986** the Education Committee agreed to fund the completion of the integration process by providing new and adapted accommodation at Sonning Common Primary School and Chiltern Edge.

A year later in **1987** the Education Committee decided to set up a nursery school in Henley. The governors of Bishopswood asked that the special needs nursery class should be transferred there in order that the integration policy be consistent throughout. The integrated nursery at Valley Road School in Henley opened in 1988.

By **January 1987** the school roll had fallen due to three factors - higher house prices and an aging population in the catchment area, the return of the few remaining children under sixteen from the local mental handicap hospital to their home authorities, and a decision by Berkshire County Council to provide for pupils with severe learning difficulties in its own schools in near-by Reading:

Despite the falling roll at Bishopswood, staffing levels were maintained and a teacher was able to work part-time supporting pupils with severe special needs in other local schools. In **September 1989**, this teacher began working full-time providing outreach support. Also in September, the headteacher and school secretary moved with the administrative office of Bishopswood School to the Sonning Common Primary School site.

In **January 1990** the Bishopswood special school building was closed. The remaining pupils moved, temporarily to Sonning Common Primary School, while building work was being finished at Chiltern Edge. The special school building was passed over to Oxfordshire Social Services Department and subsequently re-opened as the Bishopswood Centre, catering for the educational and training needs of adults with learning difficulties.

In **April 1990**, the new classrooms were ready at Chiltern Edge and the final physical transfer of our school to three mainstream school sites was completed.

This development was not part of an unfolding design conceived ten years ago when the first group of children transferred. In 1981 we had no idea then that such developments would follow. Each move was made on its own merits and brought about the need for further change to enable the school to provide satisfactorily for the educational needs of all its pupils.

● *This Report represents the views of the staff of Bishopswood and not necessarily those of Oxfordshire LEA.* *(1992)*

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INTEGRATION
IN EDUCATION

This report completes the story of Bishopswood Special School transferring fully to local mainstream, nursery, primary and comprehensive schools.

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